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The Mobilizing of America

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE PARK VIEW COMMUNITY CELEBRATION, AT WASHINGTON, D. C. ON JULY 4, 1917

BY

HON. ROBERT L. OWEN
UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

PRESENTED BY MR. SHEPPARD

SEPTEMBER 20, 1917.—Referred to the Committee on Printing

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SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 142.

Reported by Mr. Fletcher.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,
October 5, 1917.

Resolved, That the manuscript submitted by the Senator from Texas (Mr. Sheppard) on September 20, 1917, entitled "The Mobilizing of America," an address delivered by Hon. Robert L. Owen, United States Senator from Oklahoma, at the Park View community celebration, Washington, D. C., July 4, 1917, to be printed as a Senate Document.

Attest:

JAMES M. BAKER, *Secretary.*

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THE MOBILIZING OF AMERICA.

By Hon. Robert L. Owen, United States Senator from Oklahoma.

In other years the Fourth of July observance has been needed to call our minds up from our private tasks to the high thought of the Nation's ideals. But now, when these ideals have come to a final death grapple with autocracy to protect the liberty of the world, there is no need of a celebration to remind us. The best use of this great day will be to think now practically and earnestly what we shall do in the face of our stupendous problem.

Recently a call was sent out to all the men and women of poetic impulse in America asking for a fitting expression of our national sentiment. To this call more than 4,000 made answer. The poem among all these adjudged the worthiest expression of our deep and common feeling has just been published. It was written by Daniel M. Henderson, and it is entitled "The Road to France." These are some of its lines:

Thank God, our liberating lance
Goes flaming on the way to France!

To France—with every race and breed
That hates Oppression's brutal creed!

At last, thank God! At last, we see
There is no tribal liberty!

The soul that led our fathers west
Turns back to free the world's opprest.

See, with what hearts we now advance
To France!

Now, how does it happen that the best expression of the feeling of America to-day is contained in a poem which turns our thought to France?

It is not merely because of our debt to the French people for aid to us in the dark days of our own Revolution. It is not merely because, among all the nations of the globe, France has longest and most truly been our fellow in democracy. And it is not merely because of the heroism that French soldiers have shown and are showing to-day on the battle field. The explanation lies deeper. It is in the fact that, more than any other nation, France has attained a unity of consecration, a unity of participation, in this war. In France, not the soldiers only, not the statesmen only, but the people—every man, woman, and child—have come into vital and effective union for the common cause.

How has this been attained? And how is it maintained?

Every week there goes from the central agency of Government at Paris, through the Ministry of Education, a communication—the

Bulletin Administratif—to each public schoolhouse throughout all France. It carries the roll of the week's exceptional heroes who have come forth from French neighborhoods and been revealed in battle at the front. It carries the Government's report upon the conduct of the war and the Government's appeals or advice regarding the nation's needs. It goes to the servant in each neighborhood house; to the teacher, who has become more than a teacher, who has become the community secretary, and through this local official, who is the living medium between the nation and the neighborhood, it reaches not merely the children as they gather in the schoolhouse during the day, but the men and women as in the evening they assemble there.

There are the daily news flashes there as here. There is the daily press. But it is by this weekly communication of the national Government direct to every community in France; and by this weekly assembly of all the people at their common schoolhouses to receive, discuss, and act upon this thoroughly trustworthy and official information furnished directly to them by their Government, that the French people are mobilized and their actual unity of thought and courage and practical effort is attained.

Is there a demand for special effort to increase and conserve the food supply? Here is the means of placing the matter directly before all the people—not individually, one by one, but assembled together where discussion may be had and plans of effective cooperation formed through common conference. Is there a special call for Red Cross service? This bulletin brings that call home to all men and all women gathering as neighbors and united so as best to meet that need. Is there required the issuing of a new Government loan? Through their own agency of communication the people learn the facts and, assembled in the building that stands to them as the schoolhouse is to us—the place of sincerest devotion—they respond. Or is there an inspiring event, or a great word spoken, the report of which will kindle and renew the common enthusiasm, the common zeal? This bulletin sent directly from the national Government to the people as they gather in the schoolhouses conveys the inspiring message. So, for example, the text of President Wilson's speech asking for a declaration of war, and interpreting America's position, was received in every public schoolhouse in France, there to be read, considered, implanted by discussion in the minds and souls of the citizens as they gathered in these headquarters or neighborhood assembly, which have become the centers of a nation mobilized.

From England also comes the news that the War Savings Association is finding the machinery of the common schools the most effective agency for its work of reaching all the people, and the administration of food control is finding here the channel of its most efficient service. Italy, too, so far as its public school system is developed, is making the discovery that the mechanism of the children's instruction is the ready and adequate equipment for the defense organization of the whole people.

In Russia the public-school system is only now in process of establishment. But the plans which aim to equip that great land with common schools within 10 years' time include not only provision for the instruction of children but also for the use of this equipment by adults. The nation that has learned first-hand neighborhood

cooperation in the mir and the zemstvo will not be slow in developing the service of its school system as the agency of nation-wide organization of the people.

But no other nation has perfected this system of actual civic mobilization through the use of the common-school machinery as effectively as France; and no other nation has achieved the unity of spirit and effort, the freedom from duplication and wasted energy, which has been realized in France.

Now we turn our thoughts home to America.

Here, indeed, we find the recognition of the need of unity, the need to "speak, act, and serve together" in cooperation as soldiers of the common good. The perception of this need appears in every speech the President has uttered and in the words of every thoughtful student of our situation. We see that, important as are the mechanical problems of devising engines of destruction that shall be superior to those of our enemy; important as are the problems of equipment and organization of the men we send to the battle line, the first, the most vital and comprehensive of all our problems is to bring our 100,000,000 membership into a unity of understanding and effective cooperation for the common cause such as the 38,000,000 of French people have attained.

How shall this be accomplished?

In the last few weeks we have seen the issuance of a call for subscriptions to the first Government loan required by the war. Through what agency was this need explained to the people? It was presented, scarcely explained, by means of newspapers, billboards, and other advertising, precisely as though it were a private commercial interest's appeal and not the solemn call of this great Nation for the cooperation of its membership. Newspapers, of course, are indispensable, but are newspapers or billboards instrumentalities whereby the common-council assembly and actual unity of the people may be secured? We have seen the creation of the committee on food administration or control. What is its medium for reaching the people? It has recently sent a letter out through the churches. None will deny that the cooperation of all the churches is to be greatly desired; but are churches the best institutions of common assembly, of Protestants, Catholics, Jew, and Gaelic? Are they not rather institutions which reach class sections and represent only sectarian divisions of the people?

We have seen the assembling of the national leaders of the Red Cross service. Here again the channels for securing the cooperation of the people are duplicated and complicated.

Under the War Department a Commission on Training Camp Activities has been created. Its twofold object is to secure adequate provision for the leisure of the recruits in the training camps and to promote or develop wholesome leisure opportunities for the sake of these young men in the communities outside of but near these training camps. But for this, not merely charitable and private agencies are needed, but a definite public instrumentality.

The newspapers, the churches, and other private agencies have their noble functions to perform. Their cooperation is needed for the common cause and will be generously, patriotically given. But no one of these private institutions, nor all of them together, can supply the official, direct, trustworthy and central channel of con-

tact and communication between the National Government and the people of the United States that is needed for the present crisis.

There must be, for the effective mobilizing of our citizens, first, an institution in each and every local community which represents no private interest, but the common responsibility of Americans as Americans, a building capable of being used as the appropriate rallying point of men and women regularly assembling to "speak, act, and serve together" as citizens, meeting upon equal, common ground; and, second, a trustworthy and official agency at Washington where through all matters of supreme and vital importance to the citizens, as the Nation's sovereign and responsible membership, may be prepared in weekly bulletins and regularly transmitted.

Is there such an institution available in each American neighborhood, fitted to serve as a common assembly place of all our citizens?

To ask the question is to answer it, and the answer is the same as that which France has found—the public school.

Is this equipment of community buildings capable of being used for the nation-wide civic mobilization, the unified assembly, of the people which the time demands?

Except in the cities, throughout all the States, the school buildings have for 50 years been used for the regular and rightful assembly of the adult citizenship in district school meetings. And in one city after another all across this continent the awakened need of a common meeting place where differences might be put aside and citizenship expressed has led to the opening of these buildings for the use of all the people.

A half dozen years ago the man upon whom America now so largely depends—Woodrow Wilson—saw and declared the readiness of these houses of the people for just this service. Pointing to the common schools, that stand in every neighborhood waiting to be used, he said:

> They are public buildings. They are conveniently distributed. They belong to the communities. They furnish ideal places in which to assemble and discuss public affairs. They are just what we need.

And of the nation-wide assembly to fulfill the common service of this equipment for organized democracy, he said:

> What I see in this movement is the recovery of the constructive and creative genius of the American people.

Since that time provision has been made until to-day upon the statute books of 30 States may be found legislation specifically intended to make the schoolhouses available for adult assembly and all the larger service of which this equipment is capable. The States are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia.

In cities, towns, and rural communities, the necessary public funds have been or are being appropriated, and the necessary service employed to make possible, and develop, this community use of the available public-school assembly rooms. And in this time of stress, there has been the special hastening of this movement by the States

as a practical measure of preparedness and defense. For example, within the last two days New York celebrated the inauguration of the adult civic use of the public-school equipment throughout the State under what is called "the Americanization forum law" which requires boards of school trustees to provide for the use of the schools wherein newcomers and native born alike may vitalize, through common-council assembly, their sense of responsibility for, and membership in, America.

What has been happening here in the District of Columbia, and particularly in this community of Park View, where you have just elected a community secretary to serve your common assembly in the schoolhouse is typical of what is happening everywhere throughout the United States. These buildings are being used for patriotic meetings, as very generally they were used for the military registration of June 5, and will be used for the food-conservation registration of July 15 for Red Cross work, and for the manifold cooperations of communities in the common cause.

The machinery of the people's mobilization is ready. And the people have begun its larger appropriate use as the equipment of common assembly. Moreover, here as in France, the school principals and teachers are imbued with the patriotic devotion which means that they are ready to serve as the French principals and teachers are serving for the war-time assembly of the people wherever they may be called upon.

All that is needed to accomplish the unifying of the national mind and spirit, and the effective organizing of the national cooperation to serve the common cause, is the establishment here at the center of Government of a central agency which will formulate and send the national report each week to the people as they gather in the schoolhouses throughout America, precisely as is being done so effectively in France.

Congressman M. Clyde Kelly has introduced in the House, and I have introduced in the Senate a bill to create the United States War Information Commission to consist of the Secretaries of the several executive departments, and a civilian chairman to be appointed by and to receive his orders from the President, a commission whose function it will be to serve as a genuine and real public information agency. That is, an agency for furnishing information not merely to officeholders, and not merely to the press, but directly to the people.

Wherever throughout the United States the citizens gather in the buildings which are the natural headquarters of democracy to exercise the common right and to fulfill the present imperative duty of assembly to consult for the common good, for efforts to increase and conserve the food supply, for cooperative endeavor to provide hospital or other supplies for the American Red Cross service, for extending the opportunity for popular subscriptions to Government loans, for activities intended to enhance the vigor and health of the people by means of physical training and wholesome recreation, or for other purposes designed to support and strengthen the Nation in time of war, there, upon application of the person designated by the people of the local community to serve as their agent, the Government's commission, will under this plan, send each week its official bulletin or report upon the progress of the cause of democracy in the world

struggle and the cooperation required of the people to assure America's success.

On this day, 141 years ago, the immortal declaration was signed. The most important words in that great document are not its statement of the reasonableness of democracy, are not its proofs of the viciousness and absurdity of one-man rule, are not even its announcement that henceforth the subjection of Americans to any other nation was ended. The most important words in that mighty declaration were those with which it closed, and without which what precedes would have had no significance:

> For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

It was because the heartfelt union of the people, symbolized in that mutual pledging of the 56 signers of the declaration was a reality, because the people themselves were actually united on common ground in the common interest—that the struggle for liberty upon this continent was won.

As we make the schoolhouses serve as our common assembly place, to unify and consolidate our people, as the town halls served the assembly of our fathers, we are not only worthily emulating their noble example and making democracy invincible in America, but we are establishing the best means of fellowship with citizens in other democracies; we are finding the way to the first-hand, direct, effective, organization of humanity for the establishment of democracy throughout the world.

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